GAZETTE SUN NOV 10, 1996

Palmer/'This is an incredibly important decision'

From A1

passes a policy that restricts student writers, plenty of Colorado school districts will follow suit.

"This is an incredibly important decision," Plungy said. "This is going to influence a lot of school boards in the state. There are a lot of boards out there who'd like to have more control over their student newspapers."

Mary Margaret Nussbaum never knew this was coming.

"I had no idea this would be such a big deal," she said last week.

Nussbaum has been at The Lever for four years, working her way up from reporter to the top job. During that time, the paper has received about a half-dozen letters from gay students who felt they weren't being represented in the newspaper.

The topic seemed custom-made for the award-winning paper.

"We always strive to take real issues and have a thoughtful discussion about them," Nussbaum said. "Our last front page was on the football team, but we also cover issues like graffiti, Amendment 17 and date rape."

Well-done story moved onto Page 1

Last year, students considered a story about Inside/Out, a local support group for gay, lesbian and bisexual youths. But the support group is confidential, a journalistic roadblock. So the idea was dropped, only to resurface in a different form.

This time around, students settled on a new approach: Interview gay students who had graduated from high school about their experiences. Knowing the topic could be touchy, the journalism students who staff The Lever decided on the softer format of a feature story.

Nussbaum spent about three weeks reporting and writing the story, which included interviews with two lesbians, a scene from a local gay club, and telephone numbers for local and national gay youth hotlines. On the inside was an editorial written by another student advocating same-sex marriages. Among other things, the editorial reasoned that gay unions would not threaten the institution of marriage.

Both pieces went through the usual review. Nussbaum looks over each story with two other student editors and Puzick, an English teacher and the paper's faculty adviser. The Lever also has an advisory board, which includes a teacher, two parents, the editor of the Colorado Springs Independent and two Gazette Telegraph newsroom employees. The advisory board critiques the paper after publication.

Puzick told the school board last week that the article and editorial clearly followed district policy. In fact, Puzick and the rest of the review team thought Nussbaum's story was so well-researched and well-written they pulled it from the inside features section and put it on the front page.

The day it was published, The Lever received one letter. It was from a Palmer High lesbian, thanking the paper. In the halls, students talked about the story. That was it.

But not for long.

Word of the story traveled to Will Perkins. The day after it was published, the chairman of Colorado for Family Values, the group that promoted Amendment 2, went to the school to pick up a copy of the paper. On his way out, Perkins saw Palmer Principal Jay Engeln and met with him in his office.

One week later, stories had been published in The Independent and the Denver Post about Perkins' disapproval of the story. D-11 school board president S. Kent Olvey, who said he hadn't read Nussbaum's story at the time, was quoted as saying he felt The Lever piece was inappropriate for a student newspaper, which should reflect the "traditional Judeo-Christian, heterosexual standard of the community."

The three local television stations ran stories on the flap. The Gazette Telegraph published a story when it was announced that the school board planned on reviewing its publications policy. On Friday, it weighed in with an editorial.

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>
> **Editor-in-chief**
> **Mary Margaret Nussbaum**

Nussbaum thinks she knows why her story grew into a controversy. "The media made it happen."

Much learned from Amendment 2

All the while, a network of activists was watching, including members of Ground Zero, a gay rights advocacy group, the local chapter of Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays, Citizens Project and the Pikes Peak Human Rights Coalition.

Frank Whitworth, executive director of Ground Zero, said he and others were worried the school board would ram through a proposal to censor stories about gay and lesbian youth. So phone calls, letters and faxes were sent out, urging activists and the media to attend last Wednesday's school board meeting. The activists had learned some valuable lessons from Amendment 2.

"We stepped forward and said, 'We're not going to be railroaded on this issue,' " Whitworth said. "Progressives have learned in this community that you have to get your message out. The more people you have, the more you'll be heard."

The meeting was so crowded every seat in the district's board room on El Paso Street was filled. Students sat in aisles and residents of all ages spilled out into the hallways.

A handful of opponents believed gay issues had no place in a student newspaper. They were clearly outnumbered. Speaker after speaker endorsed the story and opposed restrictions on student journalists.

Other views are sure to be heard. "The Christian community needs to organize. That meeting did not reflect the feelings of Colorado Springs," said Heidi O'Brien, a Palmer parent.

As it stands, though, the school board is tightly focused on media law, not morality.

The current rules state that students cannot distribute stories that are libelous, obscene, violate privacy rights or disrupt students' normal school activities. These are the same requirements in the Colorado Student Free Expression Law, which gives student editors the power over what gets in print. The state law, passed by the Legislature in 1990, was in reaction to a landmark U.S. Supreme Court ruling that opened the door for school officials to veto certain stories.

But a new proposal drafted by D-11 attorneys is being considered. The proposal would allow principals and faculty advisers to sink stories that could be seen as advocating drug or alcohol use or irresponsible sex, or conduct that is "inconsistent with the shared values of a civilized social order." Writing interpreted as associating the school with a controversial or sensitive issue also could be pulled.

Just what the school board will decide isn't clear.

Member Art Nutter said there should be limits on students' free speech. Member Shawn Yocum-Alford says censorship isn't the answer. And the two members of the board's policy subcommittee, Lyman Kaiser and Bruce Doyle, were split over the proposal. Kaiser said the proposal has merit. Doyle says it goes too far.

"This is an emotional issue on all sides," board president Olvey said. "This board will try and do their level best to come up with something we can all live with."

'Thank God, we're not the Navy,' and look what happened," she said.

In 1991, female Navy officers complained of being groped and fondled along with other women by drunken male Navy officers at a convention of Naval aviators in a Las Vegas hotel.

After Tailhook, the Navy instituted an aggressive campaign to educate service members on the extent of sexual harassment in the Navy and how to stop it or, failing that, to report it.

In a Pentagon study on sexual harassment completed last May, the Navy was reported to have made more progress than the other services in combatting the problem. The study found that the incidence of sexual-harassment complaints is going down in all services, from 64 percent of women in 1988 to 55 percent last year. And it said the Army ranks second to the Marine Corps in its rate of sexual harassment.

The study defined sexual harassment as "unwanted or uninvited sexual attention," ranging from actual or attempted rape and assault to such things as jokes and whistles.

The study of 90,000 service members, released in July, did not disclose figures on sexual-harassment rates in each service. The rankings were made available to The Associated Press after appearing this week in Navy Times, a private publication.

The Pentagon survey reported that only 45 percent of Army women think their senior commanders make "honest and reasonable efforts" to halt sexual harassment.

The Air Force, as in 1988, showed the lowest overall percentage of harassment among women surveyed, at 49 percent. The Coast Guard reported that 59 percent of its female personnel complained of harassment.

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GAZETTE SUN Nov 10, 96

Article on gay teens makes the news itself

Story in Palmer student newspaper a rallying point

By **Wendy Y. Lawton**
Gazette Telegraph

The staff at the Palmer High School newspaper had kicked the idea around for a while but never wrote a word. Then, in September, someone in Vince Puzick's fifth-period journalism class tossed it out again: a story about the difficulties faced by gay students.

Teens going through tough times, the hardships of being different — it was the kind of story Mary Margaret Nussbaum liked to tackle. So the editor-in-chief of the Palmer newspaper, The Lever, signed up to write the story.

On Oct. 24, Nussbaum's article, headlined "Finding True Love: Gay teens search for a place," appeared on the front page of The Lever. It barely registered a ripple.

Now Nussbaum's story is big news.

It touched off a chain reaction that culminated Wednesday in an unusually packed, emotionally charged Colorado Springs School District 11 school board meeting. The topic of the article — and whether it should have been published at all — clearly struck a nerve still raw from the battle over gay rights and Amendment 2.

Many speakers at the meeting said homophobia was at issue and urged community acceptance of gay teens and adults. Some said the treatment of all minorities was at stake. Others argued separation of church and state was the meat of the matter. Views were aired past midnight on censorship, the mission of public schools, AIDS awareness, Christian values, the rights and responsibilities of the press.

Regardless of what pulled almost 50 people to the podium that night — and at least another 50 to the audience — the matter the school board will decide is this: What can students in the city's largest school district publish in their newspapers, magazines and yearbooks?

In the wake of The Lever controversy, the board is reviewing its policy covering school publications. Members have taken the unusual step of soliciting written comments from the public. Board members predict a vote won't come for weeks, given the intensity of opinion.

When the final decision is made, it will affect all 31,000 District 11 students, either as readers or writers.

But the decision could be bigger than that. Barbara Plungy, executive director of the Colorado High School Press Association, predicts that if D-11

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help out around the house. A more effective way to gain the cooperation of your children may be to give them chores commensurate with their ages and abilities.

In the November issue of Ladies' Home Journal, Dee Shepherd-Look, a clinical psychologist in Northridge, Calif., offered the following suggestions:

■ Ages 5 to 8: Assign routine chores that take no more than 10 minutes to complete. Choose one personal task, such as picking up toys, and one family task, such as setting the table. Add a chore each year.

■ Ages 9 to 12: Kids this age can handle tasks that take half an hour to complete, such as doing the laundry or watering the lawn.

■ Ages 13 to 15: Young teens should be responsible for keeping their bedrooms and bathrooms clean, cooking simple meals, doing yardwork and supervising younger siblings.

Memory lapses quite common in Americans

Many stressed, sleep-deprived and overworked Americans have begun to fear they are losing their minds. Memory loss has become a primary concern for almost half of Americans, according to a recent survey in McCall's magazine.

However, memory expert and author Dr. Barry Gordon says that lapses in memory are quite common in healthy, middle-aged people due to factors of a fast-paced lifestyle.

The November issue of McCall's offers the following tips for reducing forgetfulness:

■ Relax. Hormones released in response to stressors may not be healthy for brain tissue. Prolonged exposure to these hormones can cause cells in the memory center of the brain to atrophy and die.

■ Get more sleep. The average American requires 8.1 hours of sleep a night, but gets only 6.4 hours. Many experts believe that long-term memory storage takes place during REM (rapid-eye-movement) sleep, when eyes flutter behind the lids.

■ Work your body. Exercise at least three times a week for a half hour. Aerobic exercise improves the flow of oxygen to the brain.

■ Exercise your mind. Mental workouts are crucial for memory and overall brain functioning.

■ Eat well. Research shows that overly restrictive diets can weaken the mind.

■ Use drugs wisely. Certain types of medication can have an impact on brain functioning. The antacid cimetidine, for example, has been reported to cause mental dullness.

■ Get help for depression. Depression and compulsive worrying can cloud the mind and prompt lapses in memory.

CORRECTIONS

The Gazette Telegraph strives to be accurate and complete in its coverage. Error of fact or omission will be corrected promptly. Corrections in obituaries can be found on the For the Record page. To notify an editor about a mistake, call 636-0266.

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